

RECENT SMALLPOX EPIDEMIC IN DENVER*

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When an epidemic appears in a city the health authorities are in a peculiar position. If publicity is given it meets with opposition from business interests. If the fact is concealed the disease gains a foothold. When the epidemic of smallpox appeared in Denver, the health department took the stand that the public should know the actual facts, and nothing should be concealed, and while this to a certain degree was a new departure untried by those who do not know actual conditions, and when opposition of all kinds springs up from every cult, ism or pathy, and also from those who think their advice is essential to control an epidemic, and always stand ready to criticize and condemn any measure not proposed by them. In this city the main opposition we had to encounter was from the chiropractors and the Medical Liberty League. The former cult spent thousands of dollars in half-page display advertisements in the daily papers advising people not to allow physicians to inject tuberculosis, syphilis, and other disease germs into their bodies. They invited a debate, and the fact they were ignored hurt them more than anything else. The Medical Liberty League also generously displayed their propaganda by the same method. This propaganda was continuous, and some of their representatives were present at all meetings, where they were allowed to talk and display what they did not know.

When the papers published the names and addresses of those who died, and stated whether they were vaccinated or not, the people began to realize their danger, and they voluntarily came by thousands to the health department to be vaccinated. This was in addition to those who employed their own physicians, and in fourteen months over 200,000 were vaccinated in this city. We enforced compulsory vaccination of school children and were supported by the school board. Out of a population of over 50,000 school children only 275 were refused admittance to

school on account of objection to vaccination. This was up to December first, and since that time the majority of those have been vaccinated.

The peak of the disease was reached during the week ending November 2d, and while this was known to the health authorities we could not announce it because we knew that vaccination would cease. On November 25 we requested the U. S. Public Health Service to send a representative to confer and advise with the city authorities, and Dr. T. W. Perran arrived here November 30 and remained until December 15, when he was relieved by Dr. Lake, who remained until the early part of January. Both of these physicians rendered valuable aid and the health department coöperated with them in every way.

During the middle of November free vaccination stations were established and maintained in every part of the city, and thousands were vaccinated by this means. All large mercantile houses, factories, laundries, restaurants, etc., were visited by a corps of physicians and their employees were vaccinated and in this we had the support and backing of the Civic and Commercial Association, and hence the objections and opposition were decidedly lessened. For the past twenty-five years Denver had its usual quota of smallpox, but only two deaths occurred in that time, and people refused to be vaccinated, or were careless and were not vaccinated, as they did not fear the disease, and when this epidemic appeared it found a large number of unvaccinated people who were not immune and were susceptible.

While the actual number of cases was not alarming, we were visited by the most malignant type of disease that has ever appeared in this country, in which not only the mortality was great, but serious complications were numerous, such as diphtheria, scarlet fever, abscesses, synovitis, erysipelas, eye and ear complications, various infections and nervous phenomena. These complications increased the mortality in many cases.

Our mortality was a little over 30 per cent.

* This statement was prepared by the author at the special request of the editor.

The disease spread in many sections on account of its similarity to measles in the early part of the disease, and in instances physicians seemed to be justified in diagnosing measles in the beginning. If, however, the cases were followed up closely, other symptoms of smallpox developed and the diagnosis was certain. In obtaining evidence and history of vaccinations we had to accept the statement of the patients, some of which we know were not authentic or definite. Of those who died the period of vaccination was over seven years, and of those who recovered the period in some cases was less; the average period, however, was about twenty years and over.

In accepting evidences of vaccination of school children we did not recognize the hypodermic method or any method which did not show evidence of vaccination. This was done on account of the chances of fraud by disreputable persons who would take advantage of such an opportunity.

We have published in full all facts pertaining to this epidemic, with the hope it would be of benefit to some other city which may have a similar epidemic, and we gladly mailed the same to any physician who desired it. We published the names of those who died in order to combat the old cry of "the health department does not give names and facts, and conceals the truth."

SMALLPOX RECORD FOR DENVER, COLORADO, FOR MONTH OF DECEMBER, 1922

Total number of cases.....	81
Total number of deaths.....	21
Total number not vaccinated.....	55
Total number vaccinated.....	26

WHEN VACCINATED

1-9 years ago; 2-20 years ago; 1-21 years ago; 1-22 years ago; 1-24 years ago; 1-25 years ago; 1-26 years ago; 2-28 years ago; 1-32 years ago; 1-33 years ago; 1-36 years ago; 1-39 years ago; 5-40 years ago; 1-41 years ago; 2-43 years ago; 1-48 years ago; 2-60 years ago; 3 after exposure; 1-7 months ago. (This was a child eight years of age. There was a question of diagnosis. Three physicians visited the case, two pronounced it chickenpox and one smallpox. We have classified it as smallpox.)

HISTORY OF VACCINATED CASES WHO DIED

Total number of deaths.....	21
Total not vaccinated.....	16
Total vaccinated.....	5

WHEN VACCINATED

1-25 years ago; 1-28 years ago; 2-40 years ago; 1 was vaccinated after exposure.



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